

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE **A-1**

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Call to Religious Network Started Spy Case Rolling

Walker Daughter Asked '700 Club' Help

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Laura Walker Snyder wanted guidance from God. And listening to the voice of video evangelism, she sought a way to end the bitterness, the conflict and the troubles in her life.

"That original call," said Terry Heaton, producer of "The 700 Club," which received a telephone appeal from Snyder in 1983, "came from a young girl with her marriage on the rocks, her family in shambles, seeking prayer and guidance. That is what started the whole ball rolling."

Advice from an anonymous telephone counselor that day eventually led Snyder to born-again Christianity and to an attempt to rid herself of the person she believed had tainted all

she loved and had nearly taunted her into doing the unmentionable to her country: her father, John Anthony Walker Jr., now accused of being a Soviet spy.

Snyder's beliefs impelled her to call her mother in an attempt to persuade her to talk to federal authorities about John Walker, friends said. And with a phone call seven months ago, Snyder touched off the unraveling of an alleged spy ring that authorities say included not only her father but her younger brother and uncle.

She kept quiet for years, she said, because her estranged husband "blackmailed" her, threatening to implicate her father if she attempted to regain custody of their son. Her husband, who lives in Laurel, denied that charge yesterday.

Snyder's remarks were part of an interview, which Snyder offered to the Christian Broadcasting Network last week for its "700 Club" program. One part of the interview was aired yesterday; another is scheduled for today.

John Walker, she said in today's segment, didn't "like me to call him Dad. He likes to pretend that he has no responsibility to his children. He's just this guy I happen to know."

"He wanted to live in the greatest country in the world and to have all the benefits and the freedom of living in this country, but he didn't want to have to be loyal to it," she said in yesterday's interview. "He would rather sell it."

Her father's chosen life, which she said was a known deception in a family of six that would be divided by divorce, was a cruel secret for Snyder to keep over the last few years, she said in the interview.

Love for her son Christopher—a love that last week pushed her to make a desperate, successful effort to claim the child based on counseling with a lawyer from the Christian Broadcasting Network—was what led Snyder and her mother to report Walker in November 1984 as a spy, she said.

Phillip Mark Snyder denied in a telephone interview yesterday that he had made such a threat and said his wife was "hiding behind God" in her attempt to get Christopher.

Federal indictments charge Walker, 47, with espionage and portray him as the mastermind of a conspiracy that authorities say is one of the most serious espionage cases in recent years.

Also charged are his son Michael Lance, 22, John Walker's brother Arthur James, 50, and John Walker's former colleague and Navy friend, Jerry Alfred Whitworth, 45.

FBI affidavits had indicated earlier that they were led to Walker by a tip from two confidential informants.

Walker's former wife, Barbara, has said in interviews that she made a call to the FBI. Laura Walker Snyder had been identified as the other person who implicated Walker.

Snyder, who has been separated for the last three years from her husband and 5-year-old son, has refused to discuss her role since the series of arrests began in mid May.

That silence ended in the television studio of the religious network that Snyder said helped her appeal to her mother, who resembles her

25-year-old daughter, to tell the truth about a family deception.

Those who have come to know the pretty, dark-haired woman said Snyder made the decision to expose her father more than a year after she contacted counselors at "The 700 Club," a religious organization that has a five-day-a-week television show and a telephone counseling service.

Her friend Marie Hammond, the wife of a former Army colleague of the Snyders, urged Laura Snyder to make the call for guidance, friends say. Hammond dialed the number and Snyder spoke, Snyder said in the interview. Snyder, as she told the counselor, was looking for a solution to a troubling problem—one that erupted when her marriage to Phillip Mark Snyder ended—of how to obtain custody of her son.

Snyder said she had wanted the child since the couple separated in 1982 but, as she told friends since the alleged espionage has come to light, something her husband had threatened to make public stopped her.

Her husband, she said, knew John Anthony Walker Jr. was a spy. Her father had repeatedly tried to entice her into selling secrets when she was a communications specialist in the Army from 1978 to 1979, she said, and she shared her fright and shock with her young husband. When the marriage failed, she said, her husband, whom she now calls "a little immature, irresponsible . . . [but] sweet and gentle," threatened to reveal that.

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"My husband was blackmailing me," Snyder said in the television interview. "He told me that if I tried to get the baby, he would turn my father in or tell what he knew and he would destroy the family."

Snyder, in the interview, gives this account of what happened next: Her counselor at "The 700 Club" prayed in tongues and then offered a message, which Snyder recounted to friends. She was told that: She should stop seeing her then boyfriend, Steven. The Lord had heard her cries and seen her tears. She should guard against bitterness. She should be baptized in the family of the Lord. And her son would be returned to her.

Snyder, struck that the counselor would know the name of her boyfriend, followed the advice. She prayed. But as the months passed, Snyder realized the only way to lose that bitterness would be through her family, most importantly her mother, Barbara Walker.

At the time, Snyder, who was living in Buffalo, N.Y., hadn't spoken for 18 months to her mother, who was living on Cape Cod, Mass. It was the kind of self-induced estrangement that seemed a way of life for the Walker clan, a family that Snyder said in the television interview was never close. But Snyder, looking for the spiritual healing, again reached for the phone.

It was Nov. 23, 1984, her mother's 47th birthday.

During that call, Snyder appealed to her mother's sense of family. Snyder said she was thinking, "You don't understand the pain I'm going through. You haven't lost a child." You haven't heard from me for 18 months, she told her mother; now you know what I've been going through without Christopher.

"As long as the father was free," said producer Heaton, "they realized they would never see their son and grandson."

The day after the phone call, Barbara Walker went to the FBI, Snyder said in the interview.

"I supported her 100 percent from the very beginning . . . the day after I called her, she called me and said, 'I called the FBI. I turned your father in and will you help me, will you support me?' " Snyder said in the interview. "I said: Absolutely . . . I will go to the ends of the earth for you."

Neither of the two realized Michael Walker would be implicated in the case. Barbara Walker has since voiced bitter, angry words about her husband for allegedly drawing the youngest of their four children into a spying-for-profit scheme. Snyder described the realization as a "fatal blow."

"I've always been very close to my brother. I'm devastated . . . Something inside is telling me my father knew that he'd been turned in and he did this. He never told my mother [about Michael] because my mother met with him last summer and he could have said, 'Barbara, don't do this because your son's involved.' I'm not admitting my brother's guilt, I'm just saying what the newspapers are saying."

"See the irony?" Snyder said. "She turns in my father so that I can fight for my son and her own son is now a victim."

Describing her father as a manipulative, self-centered and arrogant man, Snyder said she believed her father "brainwashed" her brother into cooperating with his life style when the boy moved into his home in Norfolk after the divorce.

If Michael acted as prosecutors charge, she said, "I don't think he really understood what he was doing. I know Michael was manipulated. My father tried it with me."

"First, he'd break you down and make you feel like the lowest form of life. He'd say, 'You know, you're never going to be successful and you can't do anything with your life. You're not a very bright person. Why don't you let me help you make a lot of money . . . You're just never going to make it in this world, don't you understand? You're just not anybody special. But I've got a way of helping you to earn a great deal of money.' "

Walker's arrest on May 20 released Snyder from the fear that her family would be exposed by her husband.

It led her to retreat from publicity to the small town of Canton, N.Y., where her friends the Hammonds lived. Together, they would make weekly trips to a nearby fundamentalist church, where they would sing, pray, dance and speak in tongues with others in the 250-member congregation, according to Richard W. Sinclair, pastor of the Christian Fellowship Center.

That newfound freedom also drove her to plot to take her child from her husband.

She said she made her move the day before Father's Day with her friend, Marie Hammond, who had helped her make the move toward Christianity years ago.

Gary Evans, the corporate attorney for the Christian Broadcasting Network, said yesterday that he advised the young mother that, because the couple was still married, she had as much right to her son as the father. Prince George's County police say no charges will be filed because neither has legal custody of the child.

"I helped her get the address," Evans said. "We went through the U.S. attorney's office in Baltimore and they gave the address and the telephone number." Evans said yesterday he did not consider himself Snyder's attorney but was her spiritual counselor.

With that help from the broadcasting network, Snyder said she devised a plan to stake out her husband's apartment in Laurel and take the boy when he was playing. The plan worked.

"Now that she has her son, she will be making some definite plans in the future," Evans said. "But everything in her life up until now has been directed at getting custody of her son." Yesterday's broadcast showed her with Christopher.

It was, she nodded in agreement with her interviewers, a "tremendous answer to prayer."

Staff writers Sharon LaFraniere and Victoria Churchville contributed to this report.